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Sheldon, James O.

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annual meeting of the...

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1865

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ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE

ANNUAL MEETING,

OF THE

N. Y. State Agricultural Society,

ALBANY, FEBRUARY 9, 1865,

BY JAMES O. SHELDON,

PRESIDENT.



PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIETY.

ALBANY :

VAN BENTHUYSEN'S STEAM PRINTING HOUSE.

1865.

ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN OF THE NEW YORK STATE AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY:

I approach my last official act with feelings of deep emotion.

I am almost overwhelmed as memory turns back only one short twelvemonth, when before you stood, in the place I now occupy, in the dignity of mature manhood, our honored friend,
EDWARD G. FAILE.

Death has entered our Society the past year, and taken from us, not only several of our active members, but two of the most useful and influential of our Ex-Presidents; and I deem it but justice to your feelings, to pay my humble tribute to them here.

On learning of the decease of these gentlemen, our Executive Committee requested memorials prepared, to be delivered at our annual fair in September. This melancholy task was entrusted to the Hon. LEWIS F. ALLEN and the Hon. A. B. CONGER, Ex-Presidents, and most faithfully and feelingly have they fulfilled the trust.

These memorials were delivered in your presence, and will be published in our Transactions. They are so full and complete as to leave but little for me to say.

At an early age I became acquainted with Mr. FAILE, and from that time till his death he was one of my most valued friends.

He commenced his mercantile career in the city of New York in 1821, and such were his industry, perseverance and strict integrity, that his labors were crowned with success, and he retired from active business in 1853, with an ample fortune, beloved and respected by all who knew him.

In withdrawing from an active commercial life he did not give himself to the pursuit of ease or pleasure, but retiring to his home in Westchester Co., he gave much of his time to those noble charities which surround our metropolis.

Inspired as he was with a large-hearted and generous benevolence, he devoted himself to ameliorating the condition of the orphan; in endeavoring to reclaim the profligate and vicious, and to render self-reliant and respectable the destitute and depraved. Although he was much occupied in these acts of benevolence, and with the management of his estate, he still found time

to devote to our Society and the object we have in view: The advancement of the Agricultural interests of the Empire State,

In the management of his farm he studied the useful rather than the ornamental, and while the utility of everything surrounding his mansion was apparent, the graceful and refining landscape, moulded by his hand, showed refinement and taste.

His culture was thorough and systematic, his crops were large and his cattle selected and bred with great care and judgment. In these particulars he afforded an example which might well be imitated by all engaged in agricultural pursuits.

He purchased, some years since, a farm at White Plains for his son, and here he devoted his time and talents to render what was wet and unproductive, dry and fertile.

Here he commenced a thorough system of under-draining and manuring which has made those fields as productive as any in the State. These experiments, so satisfactory in their results, have not only been of great service to his immediate neighborhood, but I am sure that every member of this Society has been stimulated by his example.

In agricultural education he felt a warm interest, and a few years since became a trustee in the New York State Agricultural College, where he labored in the management of what he hoped would prove a great benefit to the farmers and farmer's sons of our State.

His valuable services in our Society are well known to you all. From the time he first became a member he manifested the most constant exertion and effort in our behalf. I think no member has ever brought into our treasury more money for life-membership; and the names handed in by Mr. FAILE showed that whether on the farm or in commercial circles his mind was ever active for our good. As a member of our Executive Board he was zealous, constant in his attendance, and sound in his deliberations and advice. He was eminently practical, and his sound judgment and wise counsels will long be missed by every member of the Society.

I have dwelt at some length upon the services of Mr. FAILE in behalf of agriculture, as I feel his a remarkable instance of a merchant, retiring from an active city business to the quiet and peaceful pursuits of the farm, and devoting himself to the advancement of the interests of the farmer.

His clear mind realized that upon the farmers of this country all our hopes as a nation depend. He realized that "the cultivation of the soil is the foundation of all public prosperity," and to the advancement, encouragement and improvement of this great interest, he devoted the leisure of that portion of his life which is ordinarily given to more selfish ends. But his crowning excellence was his christian character. To him the path of duty was ever *the* path. Whatever difficulties surrounded him, whatever obstacles were placed before him, he never swerved from his duty to God and his fellowman.

I honor his memory. Would that others could be induced to follow in his footsteps.

With the Hon. JAMES S. WADSWORTH, whose loss our Society, State and Country have been called upon the past year to mourn, my acquaintance was but slight. His active connection with our Society as its President was long before it was my pleasure to be associated with you. Your public records give ample proof of his labor and devotion to the agricultural interests of the State. His fostering hand was active in our Society when it was in its infancy and most needed that care, and to his exertion, in part, the success we have now attained is due.

After retiring from the office of President of the Society, in 1844, Mr. WADSWORTH avoided all public offices of trust and honor, and devoted himself to the management of his princely estate, and to the improvement of the condition of his tenants. Here, in his ancestral home, surrounded by all that makes life dear, and home attractive, and when every acre of his vast possessions had been wrested from the forest and the savage by his ancestors, he was quietly engaged in his favorite pursuits, when civil war, in all its horrors, burst upon our beloved country. It was then that his generous patriotism caused him to throw aside the luxuries of home and offer his services for the protection of our Government, its laws and its honor. And most nobly did he bare his bosom to the blast and help beat back those foes that sought our Nation's life.

After a most brilliant career of gallant services, which have scarcely been equaled by any civilian during the war, he fell, mortally wounded, on that terrible field of carnage, the Wilderness.

I doubt whether any of our noble band of soldiers have sacrificed more than did Mr. WADSWORTH, to save the heritage bequeathed us by our fathers. God grant his services may not have

been in vain, and that our beloved Union may speedily be restored in its integrity, and peace and plenty reign throughout our land.

During the year which is now closed we have been, as a nation, blessed, for while our country has been struggling for its life and existence, the hand of an overruling Providence has sustained us, and we still have a name among the nations of the earth. We have so far contended successfully against the most gigantic rebellion the world has ever seen, and have wrested from its power nearly one half of the territory once claimed and controlled by those now arrayed against us. They now offer but feeble resistance, showing exhaustion and want of confidence in their own success, and we hope the day is not far distant when all that shall be known of secession shall be in the history of the past, and our native land shall stand forth a bright example of the strength and prosperity of Republican Institutions.

We have been severely disciplined, but our fields have yielded their increase, the labors of the husbandman have been rewarded, disease and famine have been stayed, our labors have been crowned with plenty, and our homes have not been desecrated.

The past year has been one of prosperity for our Society. The reports of the Secretary and Treasurer have shown you fully the details of our operations; and it is a source of satisfaction that our influence has been widely and beneficially diffused.

Our annual exhibition was held at Rochester, in September, and we have cause for gratitude that we were favored with fine weather, which enabled a large concourse of people to visit our grounds, and aided the officers in their efforts to meet the current expenses. I am happy to state that they have not only done so, but have added to our permanent fund some three thousand dollars.

The exhibition was, on the whole, highly satisfactory and encouraging for the future. It was held while our country was engaged in a terrible struggle for its existence; while our young men were absent from home with our armies; while a draft was being enforced in the city of Rochester, and in most of the counties adjoining, and when our railroads were so crowded with an unusual press of passengers and freight that they were able to give us but a small part of the facilities they have ordinarily extended to us.

Notwithstanding these untoward circumstances our Fair was one of the most successful ever held by the Society. It was particularly gratifying to see so many distinguished agriculturists from adjoining as well as distant States and the Provinces present, showing an increased interest in our exhibitions, not only at home but from abroad.

The number of cattle and sheep on exhibition, was not as large as was anticipated, owing, no doubt, in part, to the severe drought which extended over our whole state the past summer, and the increased difficulty in procuring assistants, on account of the heavy drain on our country for men, but the quality of those presented for competition was very creditable. In fine wool sheep we have, I believe, never had such choice specimens competing, and I hope this interest, which is becoming of such vast importance, will hereafter be more fully represented.

It was gratifying to see, in the implement department, so many valuable inventions and improvements, for at the present time, when labor is so high and so difficult to obtain, labor-saving machines are indispensable, and without them we cannot successfully carry on the operations of our farms.

The new method of compressing hay by the Beater press, which was introduced to the public at Rochester, this year, promises to be of great value to our whole land. I think it is destined to produce an entire revolution in the hay market of our country, and, perhaps, in foreign countries. It has already enabled those counties remote from market to compete with their more favorably located neighbors, thus giving to the entire State a better market for its surplus hay. These presses are simple and portable, and compress the hay so compactly that it is no longer a bulky article, and as much can be put in the same space as of flour, cotton or most articles of merchandize.

From ten to twelve tons of "Beater pressed hay" can be readily stowed in a box-car, thus giving this process some fifty per cent advantage in transportation over hay as it is usually pressed. I understand that the hay retains its fragrance, and is not in the least injured by the process.

According to the last report of the Bureau of Agriculture, the hay crop of 1859 is stated at 19,073,726 tons, being an increase of 38 per cent over the crop of 1849. Now take the same average increase to 1864 and we have a crop of 22,700,000 tons, which, estimated at twenty dollars

per ton, gives a cash value of \$454,000,000, more than doubling in value the largest cotton crop ever raised in this country. In consequence of the bulky character of this staple, its sale has been limited in a great measure to the vicinity of its growth. I think we have now a process for baling which will enable us not only to supply our large cities and remote portions of our own country, but which will open the markets of the world to this important product, thus giving us a new article of export which will, I think, become a large item in our exchanges with foreign countries.

The first shipment of "Beater pressed hay," has been made to Liverpool, and the result was all that could have been anticipated. The fifty bales sold promptly on arrival, at twenty-eight dollars per ton, in gold, thus realizing, less the freight and expenses, over fifty dollars per ton in currency in New York, and so well was this shipment received that the return steamer brought out an order for three thousand tons. This order the owners of the press were not able to fill, as they were notified by Government that it needed all the hay they could prepare.

The benefits to be realized by our farmers in having such an extended market open to them, I

cannot estimate, but I think the day is not far distant when we shall be sending hay to Europe, and the principal markets of the world, in large quantities. The result of this will be an increased demand, largely increased production, better prices and its beneficial effects will be felt either directly or indirectly by every cultivator of the soil.

The other departments of the Fair were full and well represented, and the interest manifested by the visitors in the various articles exhibited, showed an increased appreciation, and gives promise of great benefits to result from our future exhibitions. The Fair passed off without a single unpleasant occurrence of any moment.

The experience of our venerable Secretary, the Treasurer and General Superintendent, enabled them to conduct their different departments in such a manner as to give entire satisfaction, and it is principally to these gentlemen that our Society is indebted for the success of the annual exhibition.

Our escape from a severe accident in the Fair grounds was almost miraculous. Domestic hall, a building crowded to overflowing, and holding at the time 2,500 to 3,000 persons, was found to be giving way, and had it not fortunately been dis-

covered in time, the loss of life might have been frightful. The avoidance of this accident has impressed upon me the conviction, that our Executive Committee should in future take more thorough means to prevent the possibility of such a catastrophe. We have before had slight accidents resulting from insecure erections, and I feel it imperative upon our Executive Board to appoint annually a competent committee, whose duty shall be to examine all buildings and platforms where there is any liability to accident, and report their security, before they shall be accepted by the Board.

In the annual address of our lamented friend, my predecessor, he called your attention to the importance of sub-dividing the committees in the machinery and implement department. He said, "I would suggest the expediency of the establishment of some system by which a more timely and thorough examination of machinery and implements, as well as the opportunity to test their practical working may be had. At the Fair last fall there were committees whose lists numbered by hundreds of implements and machinery, designed especially to promote the interests of farmers, many of them being of prime value and

importance. Now it is not possible that satisfactory examinations of such long lists can be made in so short a time as is of necessity allotted to them, and I think that the maintenance of the high and well deserved reputation of the Society, which has induced the large increase in this department, requires that timely action should be taken on this subject."

The experience of this year shows the same necessity for reformation. One committee, in the class above referred to, had one hundred and fifty entries on their list, embracing an almost endless variety of useful and valuable inventions and improvements. I would suggest that this class be divided into three or four. I think the committee would then have ample employment, and be able to discharge their duties much more satisfactorily.

The subject of more permanent locations for our Fairs, has been often before you and very fully discussed. I believe the present policy of the Society, the true one, and the one in which our usefulness will be most extended and beneficial. It is true that our present requirements, in the way of erections, are onerous on any city where our Fair is held, but I most firmly believe the benefit derived by the location is ten times what

it costs. The course pursued at Utica and Rochester, will enable those cities to have our exhibitions held there in future at a very small outlay for erections. At these points they have taken the county fair grounds and erected permanent buildings, in part, of sufficient capacity to accomodate the State Society. Were this course followed at Albany, Syracuse, Buffalo, and other places, the county societies would be largely benefitted, and our exhibitions could be accommodated at comparatively trifling expenditure. I hope this course may be pursued, as I am confident our Society would be very much benefitted, and the cities adopting this policy would themselves reap a rich reward.

The cultivation of land by steam power is a subject which has been most ably brought before you in former years, and I would not now allude to it had not time and experience thoroughly tested it. Repeated attempts have been made in this country to produce an implement which should meet the wants of the public in this particular, but, so far as I have been able to learn, nothing has yet been introduced which gives promise of success. In England, however, they have been more successful, and for the past eight

years have been improving and perfecting their steam plows. They have so far overcome the mechanical imperfections, and the prejudices existing against any innovation of the old plow, that there are now several hundred of them in successful operation in the United Kingdom. The advantages claimed as the result of their use, are very great, and well worthy our attention. The published reports of their practical working all agree on the following points:

It is claimed that as the land can be turned over so much more rapidly, every advantage can be taken of the days best adapted to work it, and that even wet days are not such obstacles as when the work is performed with the horse plow. The cultivation is found to be much more thorough, the soil is much more evenly pulverized and, consequently, better prepared to receive the seed. The greater advantages, however, are found to be that the soil can be turned over from twelve to fourteen inches deep, instead of four to seven, even in the most tenacious soil, and in consequence of the superior manner in which this implement does its work, the yield of grain is largely increased. This increase is stated to be from six to eight bushels per acre. It is also claimed that

the work can be done at less cost than ordinary plowing.

In England the farms average about the size of those in this State. There, many of the large farmers own a steam plow, while those cultivating smaller farms band together and purchase one for mutual advantage, thus reducing the expense to each party, and benefiting all by its use. Companies are also formed who purchase a plow, and then take land to cultivate by the acre. These associations have been uniformly very successful.

The engine used with the plow, being very portable, can be employed for all purposes on the farm where power is available, and on a large farm would be found very useful. If it is true in England, that the use of this implement will give the increase in the grain crop claimed by its friends, of from six to eight bushels per acre, this, of itself, would be ample reason why it should be tested here; for could our crops of wheat, barley, corn and oats be increased so largely by its use, I think there are but few farmers who would not either own one, or have one they could use.

I have often thought that this, the most important of all farm work, was done with the least

care and judgment, and I think you will all agree with me that, as a whole, our plowing is most indifferently done. The land is skimmed over to a depth of three to seven inches, and the principal object the plowman seems to have in view, is to see how much land he can get over in a day, rather than how well he can turn over and pulverize what he does.

In England the quality of horse plowing is very superior to ours, and if with their more thorough working they find this large increase in their average yield, we certainly have every reason to anticipate as great advantages from the use of steam in preparing our land for crops.

A few liberal and enterprizing gentlemen connected with us, have succeeded in obtaining a charter for importing and manufacturing the steam plow here, and I hope we may soon have this valuable implement manufactured and in general use in this country. I believe the first plow imported, arrived in the city of New York in September last, and your Executive committee hoped to have had it on the fair grounds at Rochester, and to have shown its practical working there. But from some cause the gentleman having it in charge was unable to fulfil his engagement.

I have already trespassed upon your time longer than I anticipated, but there are one or two subjects to which, before closing, I would like to call your attention.

The first is the culture of the root crop in this country. It is not my expectation to give you anything new on this subject, but merely to call your attention to a few well-authenticated facts, with a desire to elicit a more general interest in this important branch of husbandry.

Roots have been used as food for stock since the beginning of the Christian era. Columella in his treatise on Roman agriculture, speaks of the Gauls as having fed their cattle on turnips in winter. Since that time we have accounts of roots growing in favor with stock raisers, and they are now considered by many as the best basis of thorough and successful agriculture.

In the year 1777 turnips were first introduced into England from Sweden. The root crop now occupies so conspicuous a place in English agriculture that a modern writer speaks of it as that "peculiar feature which not only distinguishes their agriculture from all others, but which also enables it to stand pre-eminent." He adds, "It is by the growth of roots that the population of

the Kingdom is supplied with an abundance of healthy animal food; for if the production of beef and mutton depended upon the grasses of the country it would fall far short of the demand."

I am well aware that their climate is in some respects more favorable than ours to the very general use they make of them. They can feed their turnips off on the land in winter; this our climate is too severe to permit. But I believe this is the only advantage they possess over us, and, I think, with our long winters and the consequent necessity of feeding our stock a longer time on dry food, we have a stronger inducement for the use of roots than they. From my own experience in a very moderate use of them, I think them invaluable in rearing and feeding stock of all descriptions.

If I have any fixed determination regarding my future course on the farm, it is to increase my root culture, and I intend to raise a sufficient quantity to allow each animal a moderate supply daily.

It is well known to all that they raise very large root crops in England, that it is no unusual thing to considerably exceed one thousand bushels per acre. But the general feeling here is that in

our climate we cannot raise them successfully. In this I think we are mistaken, and in order to lay before you what can be done, I have applied to Hugh C. Thomson Esq., secretary of the Board of Agriculture, Toronto, Canada, who has kindly furnished me with a few published reports of "Turnip matches," (as they are called) to show that roots can be successfully raised here. I do not believe there are many farmers in this State willing to admit that what can be advantageously raised in Upper Canada cannot be successfully grown here.

The reports sent me by Mr. Thompson are not of isolated crops, selected throughout the Province as unusual or especially worthy of commendation, but reports of town and county contests where but few meet in competition, and where the yield of each entry is carefully given. These reports are exceedingly interesting and instructive, as they give the varied course of culture and the results, as well as show how successfully the growth of roots is prosecuted in the Upper Province, in a latitude similar to our own, and with a soil and climate certainly no more favorable to their growth than ours. These matches were first commenced in the township of Etobicoke,

near Toronto, and resulted in eleven entries of turnip fields, for competition, showing an average yield of 830 bushels per acre.

In 1856 the second match was held in the same town, resulting in six entries, showing an average yield of 792 bushels. In 1857 the third was held, with five entries, showing an average yield of 840 bushels. In 1858 the fourth was held, with seven entries, with an average yield of 969 bushels.

In 1862 a match was held by the Hamilton and Wentworth Agricultural Society. There were three entries of carrots, giving a yield of 921 bushels per acre; three entries of beets, yielding 1,031 $\frac{1}{2}$ bushels per acre, and eleven entries of turnips, averaging 975 bushels.

In 1863 the same society had competing seven fields of turnips, showing 691 bushels, and three entries of carrots, averaging 590 bushels.

In 1864 the agricultural societies of North and South Wentworth had a "turnip match," and as the report of the judges is very full and instructive, I make some extracts from it.

1st. 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ acres, Skirving's purple top; soil, light loam; wheat stubble, manured and plowed; two pounds seed per acre, in drills, two feet apart;

sown from 26th to 29th June; thinned and hoed twice; cultivated twice; yield of the piece 835 $\frac{7}{8}$ bushels per acre.

2d. About 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ acres, principally Matson's and Skirving's; soil, black alluvial, clover sod; manured with twelve loads barn yard manure to the acre; plowed in the fall, and again in the spring; three pounds of seed per acre; sowed June 15th and 16th, in drills 26 inches apart; thinned and hoed twice; cultivated three times; yield, 558 bushels per acre.

3d. 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ acres oat stubble; manured in the fall with sixteen loads barn yard manure per acre, and plowed nine inches deep; plowed again in the spring and cultivated; seed sown 9th, 10th, 11th and 13th June with purple top Swede, Matson's and Skirving's improved; drills 28 inches apart; manured in the drills with 300 pounds bone dust per acre; soil, clay loam; yield, 633 $\frac{1}{2}$ bushels per acre.

4th. 5 acres purple top; soil, clay loam; oat stubble, plowed in the fall and spring; manured in the drills with ten loads farm yard manure and 200 pounds of Coe's superphosphate of lime per acre; two pounds seed per acre, sown on the 15th

to 21st June in drills 28 inches apart; yield, $781\frac{4}{5}$ bushels per acre.

5th. 5 acres, half Laing's, half old purple top; soil, black alluvial and sandy loam; oat stubble, manured with eighteen loads of farm yard manure per acre; plowed with Trench plow in the fall, cultivated, harrowed and plowed; plowed again last of May; harrowed and rolled; three pounds seed per acre, sown 15th to 18th June in drills 24 inches asunder; seed came up very irregularly at first; horse hoed 12th July; commenced thinning 20th July; plants eight to ten inches asunder; horse hoed 3d August, and hand hoed again; yield, $628\frac{1}{5}$ bushels.

6th. 5 acres King of Swede; soil, sandy loam; sod plowed in the fall, twice plowed in the spring; manured in drills fifteen loads farm yard manure to the acre; sowed 15th to 20th June in drills thirty inches apart; hand hoed twice, cultivated once; yield, 624 bushels per acre.

7th. $5\frac{1}{2}$ acres King of Swede and Laing's; soil, sandy loam; oat stubble; plowed in the fall and again in the spring; manured with leached ashes and farm yard manure; sown in drills 28 inches apart; yield, $704\frac{4}{5}$ bushels per acre.

The judges in the above report state they "are

happy to observe that the increase in the breadth sown is very satisfactory, furnishing as it does every evidence that farmers are beginning to appreciate the advantages of this most invaluable crop. That, "this season has been one of the most unfavorable for the cultivation of the field root crops which has occurred for many years."

They recommend for heavy upland soils the Skirving's and Skirving's King of Swedes; and Matson's and Laing's purple top, for alluvial and lighter and more lively loamy soils.

The census of 1860 gives the crop of roots in Upper Canada at 20,600,000 bushels, more than the entire corn crop of the State of New York, with not one half the area of land under cultivation.

I think, as a whole, these reports establish the fact that roots can be successfully raised on this continent, and are they not encouraging to us to commence in earnest this culture in our own State?

No address of this character would be complete without allusion to the subject of agricultural education, for on this depends not only the highest development of our art, but the elevation of our pursuit to that position in social life to which it is entitled. As you are well aware, this subject

has for years past had much attention from officers of your Society, who have, amidst great discouragements, persevered in the effort to establish within our State, a high school or college, whose chief object should be instruction in the sciences connected with agriculture. They organized and put in operation the New York State Agricultural College, at Ovid, which was unfortunately compelled to close its doors in the autumn of 1861, from want of the necessary means to continue it in operation under the discouraging aspect of affairs caused by the war. Since that period, though repeated and earnest efforts have been made for aid from the legislature, nothing has been obtained from that source, not even a share of the income of public lands, granted by Congress to the States for such express objects.

But a new day has dawned on the prospects of agricultural education in this State. Within a few months one of the members of this Society, the Hon. EZRA CORNELL, one of my predecessors in office, has rendered the establishment of a great institution of this character well nigh certain. It is with pride and pleasure I tell you of his princely gift of five hundred thousand dollars, offered on condition that the State shall connect

with it the income of the public lands already referred to, and that the college shall be located at Ithaca, Tompkins county.

Leading friends of education throughout the State have come together, and have cordially united in the effort to obtain such legislation as will secure this magnificent endowment, and there is good reason to hope that before our next annual meeting, a college for the advancement of agriculture and the mechanic arts, will be established on a pecuniary basis more ample than that of any other institution in America.

I cannot in justice to my own feelings retire from the high position you have so generously conferred upon me, without expressing my high appreciation of the labor in which you are engaged, and the wish that the good work which you have so successfully prosecuted thus far, may be cordially sustained and carried forward.

May its usefulness be more and more extended, and may future generations realize the advantage of your labor, and the agricultural interest of our country take that high position to which it is so justly entitled.

I also desire to tender my thanks to each member of the Executive Committee, and to our

Treasurer, for the cordial support and assistance they have extended to me personally, and for their active labors on behalf of our Society.

To our honored Secretary, whose successful efforts in behalf of agriculture have a world-wide reputation, my acknowledgements are particularly due for many acts of personal kindness, and for his unwearied labors in his official capacity.

The mayor, common council and citizens of Rochester are also entitled to my most hearty thanks for the generous civilities they so freely bestowed upon us, endeavoring in every way to contribute to our comfort, convenience and success.

My last official act remains—the pleasant one of introducing to you my successor the Hon. T. C. PETERS, of Genesee.

23238

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